



In one aspect, the present invention relates to an interactive toy for exploring emotional experience, ^{and for identifying & naming emotion} The toy includes a plurality of manipulatives, preferably in the form of playpieces. Each playpiece ^{is generally symbolic of} corresponds to a particular emotion, e.g., love, happy, sad, mad, and scared, respectively. The toy also includes a container having a storage chamber into which the playpieces may be independently stored or withdrawn during the course of play.

In another aspect, the present invention relates to a method of exploring emotional experience. The method includes providing the interactive, educational toy comprising a plurality of playpieces and a container as described herein. A user interacts with the toy, preferably visually, kinesthetically, and linguistically. A user may interact with the toy alone, but more desirably does so with another user and/or an adult who coaches and directs learning.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The above mentioned and other advantages of the present invention, and the manner of attaining them, will become more apparent and the invention itself will be better understood by reference to the following description of the embodiments of the invention taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings, wherein:

Fig. 1 is a perspective view of a preferred toy embodiment of the present invention in which the container is a heart-shaped, pillow bag and five playpieces ^{generally symbolic of the emotions} corresponding to love, happy, sad, mad, and scared are uniquely shaped and decorated bean bags.

Fig. 2 is a perspective view of the toy of Fig. 1 showing the pouch of the container into which playpieces may be stored or from which playpieces may be withdrawn.

Fig. 3 is a front view of the heart-shaped pillow bag shown in Fig. 1.

Fig. 4 shows the playpiece ^{generally symbolic of} corresponding to love.

Figs. 5a and 5b show the front and back views, respectively, of the playpiece ^{generally symbolic of} corresponding to happy.

Figs. 6a and 6b show front and back views, respectively, of the playpiece ^{generally symbolic of} corresponding to mad.

Figs. 7a and 7b show the front and back views, respectively, of the playpiece ~~corresponding to~~ ^{generally symbolic of} sad.

Figs. 8a and 8b show the front and back views, respectively, of the playpiece ~~corresponding to~~ ^{generally symbolic of} scared.

5 Fig. 9 shows a perspective view of an alternative embodiment of a heart-shaped, pillow bag of the present invention.

Fig. 10 shows a young child and another person interacting with the toy of Fig. 1.

10 Fig. 11 shows two young children and another person interacting with the toy of Fig. 1.

Fig. 12 shows a young child pulling a playpiece/emotion from the heart-shaped pillow bag of Fig. 1.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF PRESENTLY PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

15 The embodiments of the present invention described below are not intended to be exhaustive or to limit the invention to the precise forms disclosed in the following detailed description. Rather the embodiments are chosen and described so that others skilled in the art may appreciate and understand the principles and practices of the present invention.

20 A preferred embodiment of an educational toy 10 of the present invention is shown in Figures 1 through 8b and 10-12. Toy 10 generally includes a plurality of manipulatives in the form of playpieces 12, 14, 16, 18, and 20 as well as container 22.

Each playpiece 12, 14, 16, 18, and 20 corresponds to a particular emotion. For example, playpiece 12 ~~corresponds to~~ ^{is generally symbolic of} love, playpiece 14 ~~corresponds to~~ ^{is generally symbolic of} happy, playpiece 16 ~~corresponds to~~ ^{is generally symbolic of} sad, playpiece 18 ~~corresponds to~~ ^{is generally symbolic of} mad, and playpiece 20 ~~corresponds to~~ ^{is generally symbolic of} scared.

Of course, these five playpieces and their respective emotions are merely representative of the different playpieces that may be used in the practice of the present invention to explore emotional experience. As desired, toy 10 may include any one or
30 more of these five particular kinds of playpieces and/or one or more playpieces ~~corresponding to~~ ^{generally symbolic of} other emotions. In addition to the five emotions represented in toy 10,

other representative emotions include annoyed, anxious, bashful, bored, cautious, confident, confused, curious, determined, disappointed, embarrassed, enthusiastic, exhausted, frustrated, hopeful, interested, jealous, lonely, proud, relieved, satisfied, surprised, suspicious, thoughtful, ^{disgusted} and the like.

5 The playpieces 12, 14, 16, 18, and 20 may have any of a variety of forms. For example, playpieces 12, 14, 16, 18, and 20 of the present invention may be card-shaped, ball-shaped, block-shaped, stuffed-animal like, bean bag-like, in the form of a hand puppet, in the form of a finger puppet, etc. In the preferred embodiment illustrated in Figures 1 through 8b, each of playpieces 12, 14, 16, 18, and 20 has a bean bag like
10 structure that is especially appealing to young children. For each of playpiece 12, 14, 16, 18, and 20, the bean bag structure includes one or more fabric panels enclosing a suitable stuffing material such as beans, beads, cotton, or the like. Any one or more of playpieces 12, 14, 16, 18, and 20 may optionally incorporate an audio device that emits sounds, music, words, and/or the like either spontaneously and/or when triggered by a user.

15 Each playpiece 12, 14, 16, 18, and 20 generally comprises one or more unique indicia ^{generally symbolic} ~~indicative~~ of the particular emotion, respectively. Such indicia include, for example, text information, texture, graphic information, color scheme, shape, or the like. Combinations of such indicia preferably are used to encourage visual, kinesthetic, and linguistic interaction with toy 10.

20 For example, as best seen in Figure 4, playpiece 12 ^{generally symbolizing} ~~corresponding to~~ love is heart-shaped and multicolored. The heart shape is symbolic of the love emotion. The multi-colored, rainbow-like color scheme incorporates the colors used on the other playpieces 14, 16, 18, and 20 and symbolizes that love is a composite of all emotions. This playpiece is not limited to representations in this color scheme, but may also be
25 gold, pink, red, purple, combinations thereof, other coloring schemes, or the like.

 As shown best in Figs. 5a and 5b, playpiece 14 ^{generally symbolizing} ~~corresponding to~~ happy is a sun-shaped bean bag. Fabric panel 30 includes graphic information in the form of a happy expression. Fabric panel 32 on the other side of playpiece 14 includes, for purposes of illustration, the text information "happy". Panels 32 and 34 preferably are
30 yellow, which symbolizes both happy and the sun.

As shown best in Figs. 6a and 6b, playpiece 18 ^{generally symbolizing} ~~corresponding to~~ mad is a fire-shaped bean bag. Fabric panel 36 includes graphic information in the form of a mad expression. Fabric panel 38 on the other side of playpiece 18 includes, for purposes of illustration, the text information "mad". Fabric panels 36 and 38 preferably are red, which symbolizes both being mad and the color of fire.

As shown best in Figs. 7a and 7b, playpiece 16 ^{generally symbolizing} ~~corresponding to~~ sad is a tear-shaped bean bag. Fabric panel 40 includes graphic information in the form of a sad expression. Fabric panel 42 on the other side of playpiece 16 includes, for the purposes of illustration, the text information "sad". Panels 40 and 42 preferably are blue, which symbolizes both being sad and the color of a tear drop.

As shown best in Figs. 8a and 8b, playpiece 20 is a ghost-shaped bean bag. Fabric panel 44 includes graphic information in the form of a scared expression. Fabric panel 46 on the other side of playpiece 20 includes, for purposes of illustration, the text information "scared". Fabric panels 44 and 46 preferably are green, although these may preferably be black, white, and/or gray if a green playpiece corresponding to jealousy (not shown) were to be used.

Referring now primarily to Figs. 1-3 and 10-12, container 22 includes chamber 50 in which playpieces 12, 14, 16, 18, and/or 20 may be independently stored or withdrawn. Container 22 may be provided in a wide variety of forms such as a bag, a pouch, a box, a backpack, or the like. Container 22 may be provided with an optional strap or handle (not shown) if desired. In the preferred embodiment shown, container 22 is a heart-shaped, stuffed panel, pillow bag. The preferred heart shape of container 22 facilitates the learning experience that emotions come from the body. For example, when a user stores a playpiece into container 22, the user is symbolically placing an emotion into the heart. Likewise, when a user pulls a playpiece from container 22, the user is symbolically relying upon the heart as a source of emotion.

Container 22 may incorporate one or more functional or decorative features to make container 22 more appealing to a user. For example, container 22 as illustrated includes multicolored trim 52 around periphery 54. Trim 52 incorporates the colors used on playpieces 12, 14, 16, 18, and 20 to help visually connect the heart (i.e., container 22) to the various emotions (i.e., the playpieces). Graphic or textual

→ That is, the provision of stuffing within panels (not shown) of container 22 can result in container 22 having a plush, pillow like feel, and in fact, either with or without playpieces 12, 14, 16, 18 and/or 20 stored therein, container 22 provides a soft, cushioned surface upon which a user may rest their head, using container 22 as a pillow, if desired.